

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 43

(Taken from: - "The Christadelphian" of 1873 Pages 154-158)

Colossians 3. —Paul had said (Chap.2: 10) "*Ye are complete in him (Christ);*" that is, you require nothing from the Law of Moses and nothing from philosophy to perfect your title to the inheritance that is in Christ. Christ is the head of all principality and power, and if you are in him, you are above all these, and need nothing from them. In him ye are even circumcised, which was a great point among the Jews who opposed Paul's operations among the Gentiles. How were the Colossians circumcised in Christ? Because Christ was circumcised the eighth day according to the Law of Moses. In him they participated in all the relations that he sustained, and, therefore, Christ having been circumcised, they inherited it in putting him on; only, in their case, it was "*without hands:*" that is, they didn't undergo the literal operation of the knife, yet they were not the less (legally) the subjects of this sign of the first covenant by the circumcision of Christ, in "*putting off the body of the sins of the flesh*" in baptism:

"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God who raised him from the dead."

What is true of the Colossians is true of us, if we stand in their position. Being baptised into Christ, we have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27), and, in him, participate in all that appertains to him. Our position even contains an element answering to his resurrection. We are "*risen with him;*" dead and buried to our past life; dead to our former selves as the mere children of Adam; and dead to the trespasses and sins which were the characteristics of our situation. We are "*risen*" to a new life, to a new position, to new relations, to new principles, new affections, new purposes, and a new destiny. In fact, "*if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.*"

But not all who are baptised into Christ show forth these facts. Some are bastards and not sons. Some, like Simon Magus, though immersed, have "*neither part nor lot in the matter,*" but remain as before, "*in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.*" Such are those whose hearts are untouched by the glorious things contained in the truth, being merely smitten by some aspect of the matter having relation to present circumstances and present gratifications merely. These do not see God in Christ, nor God in the institutions of the gospel, but merely the personal advantages proposed in the gospel. Such are not "*the chosen,*" though called; for the chosen are such as from a clear perception and hearty appreciation of God's overpassing greatness and their own absolute insignificance and unworthiness, "*glory in the Lord,*" and instinctively "*show forth the praises of him who hath called them from darkness to his marvellous light.*"

Now, Paul evinces his anxiety that the Colossian believers (and, therefore, all believers) should thus realise their calling in Christ, and not stop short in the barrenness of a self-satisfied and worldly-minded indifference. He desires them to rise to the greatness of their position:

*"If ye then be risen with Christ, **seek those things which are above,** where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth."*

To ward off the popular construction of these words, it is sufficient, in passing, to notice that the contrast is between Judaising things and institutions and the things pertaining to Christ.

"Why," says he, in chapter 2:20, "*if ye be dead with Christ are ye **subject to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men,** WHICH THINGS*

have indeed a show of wisdom, &c.? If ye be risen with Christ, seek THOSE THINGS WHICH are above, where Christ sitteth,” &c.

That is, “withdraw your minds from all attention to the doctrines and commandments of men, whether Jewish or philosophical, which are all on the earth, and of the earth earthy, and seek the things that are on high, and from on high, viz., **the things of Christ**, who sitteth at the right hand of God.” In a word, give heed to **the things of the Spirit**; for “*they that are after the flesh do mind the things that are of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*” —(Rom. 8:5.) This does not mean that we are to go to heaven when we die, or that we are to look at the sky as our inheritance, or that Christ will not come, and the earth reward the righteous and the sinner. —(Prov. 11:31; Matt. 16:27.) It merely means that, in the present time, the things of our salvation are concealed in heaven and not to be found on earth. The earth, at the present time, is a desert to the spiritual mind, that is so far as the constitution of human affairs upon it is concerned. The earth is beautiful, but its inhabitants, who almost concern us more than the ground we tread, are sunk far below the glory of God. There is no righteousness or salvation among men. The eye fails and the heart despairs if we look to man.

But when we look to heaven, hope revives and joy fills the heart, for there is the ETERNAL ONE who hath not made the earth in vain, and whose word will accomplish that whereto He sent it, and in His presence hath He reserved the man of His right hand, by whom the glory is to come. The things of our hope are, therefore, meanwhile, all “*above*,” and “*not on the earth*,” but this does not exclude the other truth, which is denied in the systems of the day, that these things are “*to be BROUGHT unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” —(1 Pet. 1:13.) Though “reserved in heaven,” at present we look from thence for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20), who saith:

“Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every one of you according as your works shall be.”—

(Rev. 22:12.)

“The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with the Holy angels, and THEN shall he reward every man according to his works.”—(Matt. 16:27.)

This, of course, is understood by all believers of the gospel; but the matter wherein they may fail, is the matter which Paul makes the subject of exhortation. While comprehending the “*things that are above*,” they may fail to seek them with their whole heart. They may “*set their affections on things that are on earth*,” their hearts may grow cold to the things that are of God.

“The cares and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in” (Matt. 13:22) may “choke the word and make it unfruitful in them.”

It is here that Paul’s words of warning are needed:

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: WHATSOEVER a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

A man’s actions are rightly considered as seed. They bring forth fruit, sweet or bitter, according as they are good or evil. The performing of the actions is the sowing of the seed. Actions required by the Spirit are in their own total a sowing to the Spirit. These actions are in many cases unpleasant to the natural man. To do good to the unthankful and the evil (Matt. 5:44); to seek not our own (1 Cor. 13:5; Phil. 2:4); to resist not evil and avenge not ourselves (Rom. 12:19; Matt. 5:39); to act in all things as we would that men should do to us (Matt. 7:12); to feed the hungry and clothe the naked (Matt. 25:35; Isa. 58:7; Ezek. 18:7); to visit the sick and the afflicted (James 1:27); to minister and not aim to be ministered unto (Luke 22:26-27); to **always** abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58); holding forth the word of life and saying, “*Come*” to the perishing (Phil. 2:16; Rev. 22:17); earnestly contending for

the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3); keeping the ordinances delivered unto us, continuing steadfast therein (1 Cor. 11:2; Acts 2:42); not on any pretext forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25); but breaking bread on the first day of the week in remembrance of Christ (Acts 20:7; Luke 22:19); in a word, walking as Christ walked (1 John 2:6), who hath left us an example that we should follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:21): all these things go against the grain of the old man, and are sometimes too much for flesh and blood; but the result will be sweet at last—if we **OVERCOME and keep those works to the end** (Rev. 2:26; 3:21), we shall be permitted to enter into a glorious life, which shall know no corruption, decay, or fatigue (1 Cor. 15:41-57; Isa. 40:28-31). We shall be admitted to the society of earth's jewels of all ages, risen from the dead and perfected (Matt. 3:16, 18). We shall be allowed a part in the glory, honour, power, and riches of the kingdom of Christ, when the whole kingdoms of the world shall become his (2 pet. 1:11; Rev. 11:15). We shall sit down with him on his throne, and rejoice in his everlasting joy.

Well might Paul say—

“Be not weary in well-doing: for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not.”

Well-doing may often times be wearisome, and in some circumstances, trying, even to the point of disgust. Those who are killed off by the weariness and discouragement of the way, are those who bring no fruit to perfection; and when the muster roll of the kingdom is called, they will be wanting. No man putting his hand to this plough, who turns back because of the biting wind, or the drifting sleet, or the difficult soil or the failing limb, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). It is he that “*endures to the end*” that shall be saved (Matt. 24:13); patiently continuing in well-doing; steadfast and immovable; holding fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:58; Heb. 3:6).

This kind of invincible resolution will only be displayed by those who have set their affections on the things that are above. Where a man's treasure is, says Jesus, his heart will be, and it is only where a man's heart is that he will be hearty. If his heart be in this present evil world, he will be dull and heartless in relation to the world to come; but lively on business or estate. He will be “immovable” in the wrong sense. It will be impossible to wake him up to the things that are of Christ. Perhaps a discussion will interest him, but only as a dog fight would interest him. A lecture may take his languid attention; but only as a present entertainment. Christ is not in him by faith. His throat is an open sepulchre, from which exhales the chilling and noxious air of corruption. Out of the evil treasure of his heart he brings forth evil things; out of the abundance of his worldly heart, his mouth speaketh in all worldliness and insipidity of the natural man.

A man of God's affections are on “*things above.*” The present world to him is only a probation, a convenience, a pilgrimage. He is bent on the hope of deliverance from it. —(Gal. 1:5.) What may come to his hand of its mammon he turns into a friend for the age to come, by distributing to the necessity of saints, and providing opportunities for giving to sinners the pearl of great price. He thus lays up treasure in bags that wax not old: a treasure in the heavens that faileth not. Making himself thus rich towards God, he is not like the poor fool who, the more he got, the more he enlarged his self-comforting schemes, and was suddenly summoned to leave it all. —(Luke 13:15-20.) “*Rich towards God,*” he can afford to be counted a fool, knowing that those who consider him so judge according to the appearance merely—an appearance that, in due time, will be suddenly changed to their amazement; for while he will be called to an everlasting estate and riches not to be counted, they, the now rich, will be sent empty and howling away, to lie down cursed and dishonoured in an eternal grave.

He is of those who listen to the warning of Christ: BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS! Not that he would not like to have a lot of money, like other people, but looking at all the facts of the case, he perceives that he is not his own, but only a steward, and not at liberty like

the rest of the world, to amass private possessions, but compelled to recognise the obligation of Paul's advice in this chapter, to "*mortify*" the tendencies of the natural man in this direction—this "**covetousness, which is idolatry,**" and which is as much to be eschewed as "*fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, and evil concupiscence,*" and, in one sense, rather more to be eschewed: for "*fornication, &c.,*" are offences which a man is not so likely to fall into; whereas avarice is respectable, and a thing we may easily get into the habit of indulging, from that common fear of a "rainy day" which springs from a complete lack of faith, and that desire for present comfort and honour which the possession of means secures.

"How hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

These are the words of Christ, and the lapse of 1800 years has not abated an iota from their force. Experience rather every day shows their truth; for riches surround people with a fictitious estimate of their own importance and the importance of this present evil world, and take such hot possession of their brains as to leave no corner for the affection which is set on things that are above. It is here where truth requires a man to shout loudly "DANGER! DANGER!! DANGER!!!" The ease-loving old man of the flesh so easily sinks down into comfortable doctrines, that nothing suits the occasion but the trumpet at the mouth with a loud blast, of warning. "Impracticable!" writes this class, over against the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus. The meaning of this for them is that the impracticable thing is their entrance into the kingdom of God; for no man that—where the bidding of Christ requires it—is not prepared to sacrifice all he has, yea, and his own life also, is fit to be his disciple.

"For which things' sake, cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience, in which ye also walked some time when ye lived in them. But now ye also have put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

This is briefly the position of such as are acceptably in Christ. They have put on the new man in all his characteristics; that is, they have taken Christ (the new man) as their pattern and Lord, and therefore have put off all that he condemns, and taken on all that he commands and exemplifies, being, like him, filled with "*much kindness, humbleness of mind, long-suffering and forbearance;*" and this not merely as an ornament or accomplishment of their position, but as the condition of their acceptance; for Peter tells us that it is only if "**these things be in them and ABOUND,**" that the called of Christ will obtain entrance into the everlasting kingdom, while "*he that lacketh these things is blind*"—(2 Peter 1:8-11)—a state that ends in death.

In this matter it is high time to awake out of sleep. The Lord is at hand, and what will our waiting attitude avail us if we are without the wedding garment of this "*righteousness of saints?*" We have had so much work to come at the doctrine of his coming and his work, that little time has been left for the question of what he would have of us as the condition of our beneficial relation to that work. Let us make haste to redeem the time that is left, for assuredly our knowledge of his affairs will avail us nothing in the day of his coming if we are found destitute of his commandments. It is not enough to know these things: "*happy are ye,*" says Jesus, "*if ye do them.*" Plainly has he spoken on this point.

"Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but HE THAT DOETH the will of my Father who is in heaven."—(Matt. 7:21.)